



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

REORGANIZING THE MINISTRY

HENRY F. COPE, D.D.

Secretary Religious Education Association, Chicago, Illinois

This is a plea for adaptation and specialization in the ministry of religion in order that organized religion may meet the needs of life today. Our age may ignore the church; but it knows it seriously needs religion. A closely compacted and integrated social life makes new demands on everyone; it calls for mutuality of living, service, and good will. And democracy makes the largest demands of all upon us; it is a social order impossible without a religious motive; it is a dream we never can realize without spiritual faith. Either religion will become indispensable to men, or we must abandon our hope of a democratic civilization.

There are many signs of new life in the churches. Those on the inside need no persuasion of this, but those on the outside know nothing of it, for the new life has scarcely made itself felt outside the ecclesiastical mechanisms. It has not influenced public opinion nor do men and women in this hour of keen apprehension of social cataclysms and the possibility of catastrophe count upon the church as a force that will greatly affect the character of the future. The younger ministers are frankly facing the needs of the world; a social consciousness is growing rapidly among the laymen; church bodies express themselves on vital issues of the day; steps are being taken to forget or to adjust ancient differences; money is obtained for any reasonable enterprise; serious

endeavors are being made to provide adequately for the religious training of a new generation. With all these signs of life, why is religion so ineffective? Why the paralysis that lies between promise and performance?

Is not the answer to be found in the futility of any attempt to make new vitality work through old vehicles? It is not that life is lacking but that it is choked in rusty channels; it exhausts itself in revolving ancient and cumbrous wheels. New movements always make their own mechanism.

Here is a problem one can hardly express in the form of new wine in old bottles; it is rather a matter of new forces finding suitable mechanisms or exhausting themselves in the struggle against old and obsolete ones. The church has a message for this day; has it a method by which this message can reach this day?

The social mechanics of religion have not been sufficiently considered. The methods by which the church expects to lead and save the world are traditional. They have developed gradually, largely without planning and without adaptation to changing times. Today they have crystallized into the fixed forms of local organizations which engage in preaching, worship, and to some extent in teaching. The local church, with a preaching minister as its active executive, its sole professional worker, is the normal and typical form of

instrument through which it is expected that religion will transform the world.

It is now time to take stock of this method. It is not reaching the world. On any Sunday there are more people outside the churches than within their walls. There are today more people in the United States without the church-going habit than with it. Even with the children the Sunday schools do not at any time reach one-fourth of the child population. It is easy to say that all this indicates the degeneracy of the age; that diagnosis does not write a prescription. Even if it is correct the problem remains, How can the church arrest this degeneracy? Surely it can do little until it finds a way to reach the people.

Supposing our schools had made no greater progress, effected no further changes in methods, than have the churches since 1850, would we be justified in ascribing general illiteracy to natural depravity? We live in a changing world; that means that the methods of all lives are changed and that, therefore, the methods of reaching and changing lives must change. But the church says, I do not change; I work in essentially the same ways as a century ago; the world may be revolutionized by inventions and social developments but the world will have to adapt itself to an unchanging church. And the world will not.

Might we not demonstrate the possibility of repentance and turn from a frantic "What must we do to save the church?" to a serious and persistent "What can we do to save the world?" The statement is familiar enough but the reality is rare indeed. Such a change does not mean much until there

is removed the mental reservation that we will do anything to save the world provided no fundamental changes in the order and method of churches are involved. It means little until we are willing to lose the world, our own ecclesiastical cosmos, if only men may be saved.

Suppose we might wipe out from our minds all our present pictures of churches, all the established machinery of edifices and preaching services, of ritual and meetings, and face this question, How may the great spiritual needs of men best be met today? Or if we might separate the church from its machinery, its present methods, and think of it as a body of religious persons, and then ask, How may a church meet the spiritual needs of its community?

Religious leadership is the first great need. The world waits for commanding ideals, for motives that lift men above the inevitable conflicts of selfish desire, for the voice of the prophet who calls for repentance and righteousness. Organized religion must furnish this leadership. Its first function is prophetic. It must speak with authority, not an arbitrary, factitious authority but that which men recognize because it finds an echo in every conscience. It will lift ideals, point out paths of duty, summon to high resolves. Men wait for one who lifts the torch on high, who is not afraid of that which is high, who has a prophetic voice because he declares that which ought to be.

But where is this prophetic voice heard today? Where are the prophets? We have childishly assumed that every preacher is a prophet; we have expected

to turn out about two thousand a year from our seminaries. But very well do we know that the prophets are few and far between. When one speaks all men know his voice, and few are they who speak today. The training schools, the seminaries, have curricula directed to prepare professional biblical experts, to make seminary teachers; but they have propaganda that still sets homiletics first and stirs in youthful bosoms the ambition to become star preachers. No matter what his native capacities every man faced toward the ministry of religion expects to be a power in the pulpit. But, out of every thousand leaving the seminaries, how many would ever gain any hearing at all except for the fact that the churches that hire them count it a duty to hear them?

Even when the prophetic fire is kindled we have most efficient methods of subduing it; the demands of the pastorate paralyze prophetic power. The present form of church organization demands that every minister shall be a prophet and at the same time it most effectually deprives him of any possibility of meeting that demand. It expects its minister to become an intellectual giant while it harnesses him to the petty details of a business manager, visiting nurse, popular entertainer, and physician of moral, mental, and spiritual ills. If he is tempted to become a specialist it soon reminds him of his all-round duties. After six days of exacting, multifarious, distracting, inconsecutive, and often inconsequential activities he must come before the assembled multitude with a message that shall be more persuasive than the

voice of the politician, more refreshing than the magazine article that took a week to write, more entertaining than the novel, and more authoritative to the consciences of men than all three.

The result of the present method is that we have in the churches a ministry, enamored of oratory, trained as biblical experts, engrossed in business management, but labeled as prophets. The seminary does not train for the real tasks which the church imposes; the church does not test the ministry by the task to which she calls him. If he cannot succeed as an executive, a missionary, a promoter, and a pastor he is counted a failure no matter how well he may preach; if he cannot preach he is a failure no matter how well he may function as a pastor. The successful men are of three classes: those who can do both things well—these are so rare as to be labeled as “sports,” in the biological sense; those who discharge either one or the other function so efficiently that shortcomings on the other side are forgotten; and those who have the vision and courage to insist on doing only one thing and leaving other tasks to their appropriate specialists.

But the result goes farther and is much more serious; the total effect being that the church really has lost its prophetic place. So few are the voices that speak with authority and power that the world regards them as ecclesiastical exceptions. Indeed when a true prophet appears calling men to repent many begin to speculate as to the time to elapse before the church makes it too hot for him and he is compelled to seek the freedom of an

academic position or become a free lance. The world does not count on the church for prophecy.

Yet this need not be so. There are prophets in pulpits. There are enough of them to become the moral and spiritual leaders of the nation if only we had the wisdom to do two things, to distribute the prophets aright and to give them opportunity to develop and exercise their gifts. People will crowd to hear a truly great preacher. When Beecher, Storrs, Swing, and Gladden preached the crowds were there and always there. So is it today when the speakers are Jowett, Fosdick, Fort, Woelfkin, King, Wise, Peabody—there are too many to attempt to exhaust the list. And in many a city and village there are men of not less power whose messages are just as convincing whenever they have freedom to let the fire burn within. If ever this world is to hear the religious teacher these men must be set free from their single pulpits, must be given opportunities to reach us all, and, at the same time, every manifestation of really effective prophetic power must have freedom and room to grow. No single pulpit ought to monopolize a prophet.

This calls for two things. First, a distinctly specialized ministry of preaching. It means recognizing that there are many ministers who never will be prophets. Their work will not be less useful; it will be different. The prophetic function will be particularly assigned to those who have the gifts to reach and persuade the multitude. Second, the prophets, the preaching ministers, will not be confined to par-

ticular places and pulpits. They will go as prophets always have gone, where the people are. They will seek the crowds, as all orators must do. Instead of being the ministers of a church they will become the ministers of the word to the world. Fifth Avenue will not pre-empt and monopolize such gifts; they cannot be and must not be confined.

An itineracy of the prophets would make their message, as a personal vital experience, accessible to men everywhere. It would mean the multiplying of their powers as no books or other agencies could possibly accomplish. But it would do more; it would increase each man's power in himself. The great leader is likely soon to wear himself out in the attempt to bring a new message every week to the same congregation. Not only could he, under an itineracy, preach the same sermon often, but his range of interests, his variety of contacts and experiences, would be greatly enriched.

Let men who really can preach now go forth through the world declaring the ways of God, quickening the dull hearts of men, and giving to the hungry the bread of life. Let those who have the power to set the leaven of the kingdom in human hearts now have the opportunity.

Of course this involves unifying preaching occasions. It means forsaking many traditions such as two sermons every Sunday, the pitiable spectacle of thousands of little groups, often almost lost in their auditoriums, sitting twice a week to listen to sincere but ineffectual attempts at preaching. It means community preaching services.

It would mean that in remote villages and small cities the preaching service would be a great occasion. Each time it might mean as much, and more and better, than when the stores all close because some great evangelist is to hold forth. Such occasions would become fixed festivals. Preaching would mean more if we had less of it and more in it.

It would be futile to deny that this might mean the closing of many churches. But we have moved far enough not to regard that with the catastrophic countenance of a decade ago. Many of them ought to be closed; they serve neither for witnessing, worshiping, nor prophecy. But it does not mean that all would be closed except on these occasions when the preacher came to the community. The need of worship is not less than the need for prophecy.

Worship is the second great need; the human spirit seeks to meet with its fellows in worship. At present we have but few churches with a real ministry of worship for exactly the same reasons that we have few with a ministry of prophecy, because specialization is lacking, no ministers, or few, are set aside to become really efficient in directing worship, and pastors are forced to regard this as a very small incident in their crazy-quilt program of activities. The organization of worship, its direction so as to minister to the human spirit today, so as to count for our life and for the kingdom of godlike love, calls for the highest specialization of expert powers. This ministry is fully as important as the prophetic one; perhaps it deserves more attention than has been given to the latter. But the path to improve-

ment is far from simple, it involves a scientific, reverent study of worship, the thorough training of ministers of worship, and the reorganization of the social units for worship in communities.

It is not inconceivable that practically all the people in a community should worship together. If the religious groups were no longer nucleated about the persons of individuals attempting to preach and became nucleated about the worship of God practically all the difficulties that separate congregations would disappear. The community remains split into these small groups because there are upon each group many pressures to compel them to be loyal to the minister who counts on them as congregation. To them it seems that there would be no church without his two preaching services. They follow a blind faith that every minister is endowed with gifts to be evangelist, prophet, leader in worship, educator, pastor, and manager. In the average village there are several of these general-store institutions attempting everything and accomplishing nothing, exhausting their energy in wheel-turning, bitterly jealous of one another, begging support from the community they should inspire. Is it not possible that here and there we may break away from such ineffectual methods? Is it not possible that there may pass into our regular and normal experience those well-remembered, high-level occasions when all the people gathered to listen to some commanding voice and all the community worshiped together, as in the summer evenings in many places?

There remains the pastoral function. What has been urged does not mean

that all existing churches are to be merged into community churches? Without doubt much larger units are desirable for preaching occasions and, quite distinct from these, for worshipping occasions. But it may well be that the smaller groups, usually the churches as they now are, constitute the most desirable and practicable social groups for other and not less important purposes. These are the purposes of social intercourse and all that comes under the pastoral work in a community. The closer communion of individuals, the more highly conscious fellowship, fraternal sympathy and aid, and the many forms of actual service in which church people engage may best be conducted in these smaller groups. We would have, then, this third specialized ministry, that of the pastor, the organizer of the smaller group, their leader into ways of loving helpfulness, co-operation, and service. These are like the smaller family groups where personal affections grow, where character is disciplined by close contacts, and where small effective groups are organized to work in the community and to support work throughout the world. The specialist in pastoral work makes all his parish work. Half the present pastoral work ought to be done by the people. A

peculiar type of ability is needed for leadership in such groups. It is the type that is now being developed to a large extent by the ministry today. Set free from the heavy demands of regularly scheduled preaching and from the strain of leadership in public worship it might be manifold more effective.

There is yet one other form of specialization, the educational. Its especial care is the instruction, organization, and training of the young. Already this form of specialized ministry has established itself as a distinct profession in the number of those who have trained for and are now engaged in the work of directors of religious education in churches and in communities.

We have then four specialized types of ministry: prophetic, devotional, pastoral, educational. But not necessarily four ministers to every church. Let a record of fact suffice here. The village of D—— had three churches which had grace enough to agree on this plan: the minister of one church became the preaching minister for all, the minister of another the pastoral leader of all, and the minister of another the educational director for all. We have suggested, in addition to such a plan, a ministry of worship and an itinerant ministry of great, commanding, prophetic preachers.